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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Gaynor Davison
Headteacher
Laurel Avenue Community Primary School
Laurel Avenue
The Woodlands
Durham
DH1 2EY

Dear Ms Davison

Short inspection of Laurel Avenue Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are a reflective practitioner who has a determination to ensure that all pupils in your school get the best education. Your leadership, commitment and passion have resulted in a vibrant school where children want to attend and learn.

Clear and consistent leadership has ensured that the school has continued to improve. You have an informed understanding of the school's strengths. Similarly, the areas for development are firmly in the school improvement plan and the plans are already being enacted. Your vision for the success of all pupils is clearly shared by staff, carers, parents and pupils themselves. Governance at Laurel Avenue is strong. The governing body is well led, providing challenge and support in equal measure. Governors are equally ambitious for the success of each pupil. They visit the school regularly to gather information to inform their understanding of the school's strengths and the improvements that are taking place. Governors use this information to challenge and commend leaders on the quality of education provided.

You and the leadership team have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection well. One of these was to further develop the use of mathematics in different subject areas. Leaders have developed this throughout the curriculum and designed activities that are rich and varied and stimulate pupils' imagination. As a result, pupils make good progress in mathematics because they are engaged in the learning and sustain their concentration well. For example, in history, pupils were

using their knowledge of number sequences and Roman numerals to work out the timeline from stone age to iron age.

A further area for improvement was to make sure that pupils were using the correct punctuation, spellings and grammar in their writing. You talk passionately about ensuring that all pupils understand the importance of good language skills and pupils correct mistakes as they write. Pupils receive clear guidance on how to improve their work so that they can act on the advice given and deepen their learning. Work in books shows that pupils pay careful attention to teachers' guidance. In the lessons we observed together, we saw pupils self-correcting and using editing skills to improve their written work.

Finally, you have looked carefully at further improving the quality of teaching. Staff have received training to support them in knowing how to extend and deepen pupils' learning, particularly in reading and mathematics. In reading, teachers plan learning carefully so that the most able pupils develop the skills of inference and deduction. When I listened to one reader, I asked what they thought of one of the characters. The pupil told me that the character was very 'narcissistic', because 'he thought that he was better than anyone else'. Through the systematic reading programme, pupils are developing good inference and deduction skills.

Pupils behave extremely well, both in classes and around the school at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils are respectful, courteous and supportive of the learning of others. They talk enthusiastically about the tasks in class and share ideas to support each other's understanding. All pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations. The curriculum not only offers pupils a range of opportunities to develop their skills, but also builds on pupils' interests and ideas they wish to explore. You offer a rich and varied experience which is building excellent knowledge.

You correctly judge personal development, behaviour and welfare as strengths of the school. You know each pupil very well and, as a result, are able to quickly put in place any support needed, both from within the school and through outside agencies. Attendance is good because pupils want to come to school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and it was summed up by one parent saying that 'staff work tirelessly to go the extra mile to give my child the best opportunities'. You are rightly proud of the work you do with pupils who are disadvantaged and, because of the support given, their progress in reading, writing and mathematics matches that of other pupils in the school.

Improvements in reading and mathematics continue in the school. However, you recognise that, while most pupils understand how to craft their writing, there is still work to do to enable pupils to gain a good understanding of how language works and the importance of a rich vocabulary. You know that pupils need to ensure that their writing meets the needs of specific audiences, purposes and text types. We agreed from the written work seen that pupils were not developing their own style and, sometimes, writing was stilted.

In this smaller than average-sized primary school, test results can vary considerably because of the small numbers taking the tests and often the complex needs of individual children within the cohort. In the 2018 national assessments, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was below the national average. However, most pupils' progress from their individual starting points is good.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records and reports are of an exemplary standard.

You ensure that the safeguarding of pupils is a high priority. You make sure that, prior to appointment, all of the necessary checks on staff are made to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. You have put in place regular and frequent training, including that relating to protecting pupils from extremism and radicalisation. All staff are highly vigilant and well aware of what actions they need to take if they are concerned about a child's welfare. You are dogged in following up any concerns and work extremely well with outside agencies, making sure that support is timely. Parents expressed their confidence in the school to follow up concerns. They told me that you do everything possible to ensure that their child is safe and happy.

Pupils have a good knowledge of potential bullying situations and understand the difference between 'falling out with a friend' and bullying. Pupils are adamant that bullying does not exist at school. One pupil said, 'We respect each other.' They say there is no poor behaviour, just some 'different children who are helped by us and teachers to behave better'. This is confirmed by the school's records. Pupils are taught effectively about how to keep themselves safe when they are using the internet. They know the immediate actions to take if they view anything that causes them concern. Pupils also talked about using what they learned in school to keep them safe in the community.

Pupils' attendance is at the national average. They value their education and understand the importance of coming to school regularly and on time.

Inspection findings

- Pupils at Laurel Avenue arrive at the school from many different backgrounds, and many with starting points which are lower than those typical of pupils of a similar age. Although pupils' attainment in key stage 2 has been below the national average, progress in reading and mathematics is good throughout key stage 2. However, results indicate that progress in key stage 1 phonics and in writing across the school was not as strong. Therefore, we agreed that my key lines of enquiry would focus on these specific aspects to see how leaders have brought about improvements for all groups of pupils in these areas.
- Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and priorities is objective and accurate. You acknowledge that the school needs to improve pupils' progress in

writing by the end of key stage 2. You provide compelling first-hand evidence on why progress was below national averages, the actions you have taken and the positive impact that these have had.

- You have looked closely at this year's results and noted that, owing to the small cohort, some outcomes disproportionately affected the overall figures. Nonetheless, you have reviewed your provision, including your intervention programmes. You have strengthened the teaching of writing and provide timely and appropriate interventions to support specific pupils who need to catch up. Early evidence suggests that this is making a difference and pupils' writing is improving. However, we agreed that for some most-able pupils there is not a clear link to good reading and writing to help them develop their own writing style.
- Staff training on the phonics programme is helping to address pupils' specific needs well. In a phonics session with a group of key stage 1 children, we observed how confident the pupils were in blending and reading some tricky words. When I spoke to pupils, they were able to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to the book they were reading and explained why the frog couldn't catch the bug. 'Look,' said one pupil, 'it says here the bug is too fast.'
- Leaders know individual pupils well. They assess pupils' needs accurately and have a clear understanding of pupils' barriers to learning. Staff set targets to address pupils' individual needs and provide extra help to support these pupils to achieve them. Leaders make regular checks to ensure that this support is making a positive difference to pupils' progress. You are very clear that all pupils, irrespective of their social and emotional needs, will still complete work. During the inspection, many pupils told me how they never gave up, even when learning was quite hard. Progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school is good because the teaching is well planned and clearly meets their needs. These pupils make the same progress as others in the school.
- My final line of enquiry was to check how well pupils behave. In lessons, pupils are highly engaged and are keen to share their ideas with visitors. One group of children in the early years invited me to go on a picnic, packing the hamper but asking what I would like to take. They all took turns to choose and could explain the difference between a cake and a vegetable. Pupils say that the school is both a harmonious and an enjoyable place to be. They are very proud of the number of awards they have received, including the Rainbow Award, recognising and celebrating diversity. As a result, pupils are kind and considerate to each other, interested in talking and listening to visitors and demonstrate fundamental British values, such as tolerance and understanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the teaching of writing by:
 - making sure that the most able pupils are consistently challenged in writing and that the proportion of pupils that reach the higher levels of attainment by the end of Year 6 increases

- making sure that pupils are given even more opportunities to develop their own writing style, firmly based on good models of reading and writing in school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Cave
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the course of this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, and two governors. I also spoke to the chair of governors by telephone.

I met with a representative of the local authority. I also spoke with pupils in classrooms and when walking round the school site. I also met formally with a group of five pupils over lunch.

I visited all classes with you, from Nursery to key stage 2, and undertook a work scrutiny across a range of subjects with the leaders for English and mathematics.

Policies and procedures for safeguarding were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working in the school.

A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan, policies on the curriculum, bullying and safety, documents relating to pupils' achievement, information on attendance and behaviour, and newsletters.

I considered the views of 16 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 15 views expressed via the staff questionnaire and the 23 responses by pupils.